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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6304  
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RUFHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1643  
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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: SREF, PBTS, SU, ET  
SUBJECT: SUDAN-ETHIOPIAN BORDER: IS IT OPEN OR CLOSED  
TO REFUGEES?

REF: (A) STATE 367707 (B) KHARTOUM 15948  
- (C) KHARTOUM 16329

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. WE HAVE REPORTED PERIODICALLY THAT GOS AUTHORITIES MAY CLOSE THE SUDAN-ETHIOPIAN BORDER TO REFUGEES COMING FROM ERITREA AND TIGRE. THERE HAVE EVEN BEEN OCCASIONAL REPORTS THAT THE BORDER HAS, IN FACT, BEEN CLOSED. WE DEALT BRIEFLY WITH THIS ISSUE IN PARAGRAPH 3 OF REF C. THE ISSUE DESERVES FURTHER ELABORATION.

3. PRESIDENT NIMEIRI, IN A DISCUSSION WITH THE AMBASSADOR DECEMBER 29, SAID THAT SUDAN CONTINUES TO LEAVE THE BORDER OPEN SO THAT ETHIOPIAN REFUGEES MIGHT ENTER SUDAN (KHARTOUM 16420, PARAGRAPH 6). SUDANESE COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES ABDEL MAGID BASHIR ELAHMADI ASSERTED CATEGORICALLY TO DCM ON DECEMBER 24 WHILE TOURING KASSALA AREA WITH ~~CODEL~~ ~~KNOWLEDGE~~ THAT THE SUDAN-ETHIOPIAN BORDER IS NOT CLOSED, HAS NOT RECENTLY BEEN CLOSED, AND WILL NOT BE CLOSED.

4. UNFORTUNATELY, THE PICTURE IS NOT SO CLEAR AS SUGGESTED IN THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPH. A RECENT EXAMPLE EXPLAINS WHY. DCM LEARNED RELIABLY DURING VISIT TO KASSALA AREA REFUGEE CAMPS DECEMBER 23-25 THAT A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 6,000 TIGREAN REFUGEES HAS BEEN PREVENTED BY SUDANESE SECURITY AUTHORITIES FOR APPROXIMATELY TWO WEEKS FROM ENTERING THE AD HOC TEKL EL BAAB RECEPTION CENTER INSIDE SUDAN. ON APPROXIMATELY DECEMBER 22, THIS GROUP WAS INSTRUCTED, PROBABLY BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RELIEF SOCIETY OF TIGRE (REST) AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOS, TO MOVE SOUTH ALONG THE SUDAN-ETHIOPIAN BORDER WITH THE IDEA OF ENTERING SUDAN NEAR SEFAWA. APPARENTLY, SUDANESE

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84 6069932

SCR

PAGE 002

NC 6069932

TOR: 301407Z DEC 84

AUTHORITIES WANTED TO KEEP TO A MINIMUM THE NUMBER OF NEW ARRIVALS AT THE HARD-PRESSED TEKL EL BAAB RECEPTION SITE. THOSE AMONG THE 6,000 WHO WERE PHYSICALLY ABLE BEGAN THE TREK SOUTH. DUE TO THE TOPOGRAPHY ALONG THE BORDER, HOWEVER, THEY HAD TO HEAD EAST BEFORE THEY COULD GO SOUTH. AFTER WALKING FOR ABOUT THREE DAYS, THEY REPORTEDLY STOPPED NEAR A WATERHOLE INSIDE ERITREA WHERE THEY REMAINED AS OF DECEMBER 25. SOME KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS IN THE KASSALA AREA ARGUED THAT MOST OF THIS GROUP IS NOT PHYSICALLY ABLE TO WALK TO THE MORE SOUTHERN ENTRY POINT. IN FACT, SOME 700 TO 1,000 OF THIS GROUP WHO WERE CLEARLY UNABLE TO ENDURE THE WALK NEVER DEPARTED THE BORDER AREA NEAR TEKL EL BAAB. IT WAS THIS REMNANT WHICH WE OBSERVED CROSS INTO SUDAN ON CHRISTMAS MORNING AS REPORTED IN REF C.

5. WHILE THE GROUP OF 6,000 TIGREANS WAS BEING PREVENTED ENTRY INTO SUDAN NEAR TEKL EL BAAB, ANOTHER LARGER GROUP (REPORTEDLY AS HIGH AS 16,000) WAS ALLOWED TO ENTER SUDAN SOUTH OF SEFAWA ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 21. ALTHOUGH WE CONTINUE TO HEAR THAT SOUTHERN ENTRY POINTS ARE CLOSED FROM TIME TO TIME, WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION OF THESE REPORTS.

6. WHAT DOES ONE CONCLUDE FROM THE ABOVE? IN THE STRICT SENSE, IT IS NOT ACCURATE TO SAY THAT THE SUDAN-ETHIOPIAN BORDER IS CLOSED. ON THE OTHER HAND, SUDANESE AUTHORITIES DO CLOSE PORTIONS OF THE BORDER FOR PERIODS OF TIME. WHILE REFUGEES MAY BE PREVENTED FROM ENTERING AT ONE POINT, THEY ARE ALLOWED TO ENTER AT OTHER LOCATIONS ON THE SAME DAY. IT IS MORE APPROPRIATE TO SAY THE GOS MANAGES THE REFUGEE FLOW INTO SUDAN. IT IS CLEAR THAT NOT EVERY ETHIOPIAN REFUGEE IS PERMITTED TO CROSS INTO SUDAN WHEN AND WHERE THE REFUGEE CHOOSES. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT REFUGEES ARE BEING REFUSED ENTRY OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME. HORAN  
END OF MESSAGE

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